



The sense of community in work life

A study among young adults

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Abstract:	
<p>The thesis is a qualitative study of the sense of community in work life among young adults. The aim is to investigate the phenomenon from young adults' perspective. The sense of community is a crucial part of the organization. It affects both the company and the employees. The sense of community is also important source of energy and motivation for many employees. The aim is to investigate how young adults perceive the sense of community at their workplace and what are the factors that might strengthen the sense of community. The research questions are: How do young adults perceive the sense of community in their workplace? What might strengthen their sense of community?</p> <p>The qualitative research method was chosen because it seeks to understand the phenomenon and it encourages to opening the discussion about the matter. The method also helps to investigate the meaning of the sense of community and to gain a deeper understanding of the subject. There was in total seven interviews which were conducted for this thesis. The interviews were semi-structured. The interviewees were between the ages 20 and 30. The young adults worked in different work sectors. The results indicate that the young adults perceive the sense of community in their workplace as belonging and being part of the work community, which is the same as how the sense of community was described in theory. According to the interviewees the most important features of the sense of community at work are the ability to get along with the colleagues, open communication and the possibility to influence the work community. There are both positive and negative aspects of the sense of community. Positive matters included the sense of belonging in a group, open communication and the ability to work together despite of differences. Negative features included bad team spirit, poor communication, and the imbalance of the workload. Interaction and communication are fundamental factors in the work community. When working together it often creates many kinds of challenges. The biggest challenges that often arise are due to interaction and communication. According to the interviewees, the best way to resolve the differences is by communicating and talking about them. However, it is good to mention that the interaction varies from companies and how they operate. According to the theory, the most important cornerstones of the sense of community are membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connections. A strong sense of community consists of everyone's values and needs.</p>	

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Tiivistelmä:	<p>Opinnäytetyö on tehty kvalitatiivisena tutkimuksena, jonka tavoitteena on ymmärtää tutkittavaa ilmiötä nuorten aikuisten näkökulmasta. Yhteisöllisyys on tärkeä osa työorganisaatiota. Se vaikuttaa sekä yritykseen että työntekijöihin. Yhteisöllisyys on myös tärkeä energian ja motivaation voimanlähde monelle työntekijälle. Tavoitteena on selvittää miten nuoret aikuiset kokevat yhteisöllisyyttä työpaikallaan ja mitkä asiat voisivat vahvistaa yhteisöllisyyttä. Tutkimuksessa on kaksi kysymystä, joihin etsitään vastausta: Miten nuoret aikuiset mieltävät yhteisöllisyyttä työpaikallaan? Mikä voisi vahvistaa yhteisöllisyyttä? Kvalitatiivinen tutkimusmenetelmä valittiin, sillä menetelmän avulla pyritään ymmärtämään ilmiötä ja samalla se auttaa avaamaan keskustelua aiheesta. Tällöin pyritään selvittämään yhteisöllisyyden tarkoitusta ja saamaan syvempää ymmärrystä aiheesta. Haastateltavina oli seitsemän nuorta aikuista, joiden ikä oli 20-30 vuoden väliltä. Nuoret aikuiset työskentelivät kukin eri työsektoreilla. Haastattelut järjestettiin puolistrukturoituna, ja mistä neljä toteutettiin kasvotusten, kaksi puhelimitse ja yksi Skypen välityksellä. Tulokset osoittavat, että nuoret aikuiset mieltävät yhteisöllisyyttä työpaikoillaan siten, että he kuuluvat ja ovat osa työyhteisöä, joka on sama kuin miten teoriassa kuvataan yhteisöllisyyttä. Heidän mukaansa työyhteisöllisyyden tärkeimmät piirteet ovat kyky tulla toimeen kollegoiden kanssa, avoin kommunikointi ja mahdollisuus vaikuttaa työyhteisöön. Yhteisöllisyydessä on sekä positiivisia että negatiivisia puolia. Positiivisina asioina pidettiin muun muassa yhteenkuuluvuuden tunnetta ryhmässä, toimeen tulemista, avointa kommunikaatiota ja että työntekijät erimielisyyksistä huolimatta pystyvät työskentelemään yhdessä. Negatiivisina piirteinä pidettiin muun muassa huonoa ryhmähenkeä, huonoa kommunikointia ja työtaakan epätasapainoa. Vuorovaikutus ja kommunikointi ovat hyvin keskeisiä asioita työyhteisössä. Yhteistyötä tehtäessä syntyy usein erilaisia haasteita. Isoimmat haasteet syntyvät vuorovaikutuksesta ja kommunikoinnista. Haastateltavien mukaan paras tapa ratkaista erimielisyyksiä on kommunikoida ja puhumalla niistä. Tosin on hyvä mainita, että vuorovaikutus vaihtelee yrityksittäin ja heidän toiminta-tavoistaan. Teorian mukaan yhteisöllisyyden tärkeimmät kulmakivet ovat jäsenyys, vaikutus, integraatio sekä tarpeiden huomioon ottaminen ja jaettu tunneside. Vahva yhteisöllisyys koostuu kaikkien arvoista ja tarpeista.</p>
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1 Relevancy and motivation.....	7
1.2 Research aim and questions.....	7
1.4 Demarcation.....	7
1.5 Structure of the thesis.....	7
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	8
2.1 The definition of the sense of community.....	8
2.1.1 Two sides of the sense of community.....	10
2.1.2 The core of the sense of community.....	11
2.1.3 The sense of community in a work community.....	12
3 METHODOLOGY.....	14
3.1 Qualitative research.....	14
3.1.1 Individual interviews and interview guide.....	15
3.1.2 Choosing the informants.....	16
3.1.3 Data collection and analysis.....	17
3.1.4 Trustworthiness and reliability of the research.....	18
4 RESULTS.....	19
4.1 Interview results.....	20
4.2 The sense of community according to the participants.....	20
4.3 How does the interaction affect the sense of community.....	24
5 DISCUSSION.....	25
5.1 How do young adults perceive the sense of community?.....	26
5.2 What might strengthen their sense of community?.....	27
6 Conclusion.....	27

6.1 Recommendations for future research.....	28
References.....	29
APPENDIX 1.....	31
APPENDIX 2.....	32

Figure

Figure 1. Interview Questions’ Themes.....	22
--------------------------------------------	----

Tables

Table 1. Convenience Sampling.....	17
------------------------------------	----

INTRODUCTION

According to McMillan & Chavis, a sense of community can be described as “a feeling where the members feel that they belong to a community, are a part of a community and where they are attached to the community” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The sense of community is important and one of the main factors in a work organization. (Huish, 2018) It affects both the company and the employees. Many companies nowadays mainly focus on the success of the company or organization from the perspective where the capital plays a huge part however, they might not acknowledge the fact that the employees are the one of the most if not the most important asset that they have. (Levine, 2018)

Why is the sense of community perceived as important? Under what circumstances do we need a sense of community? Psychologists have researched the sense of community and its significance in many works and peer communities. In work communities, a sense of community has been found to increase job satisfaction, employee well-being, loyalty, selflessness, and attentiveness. (Heinonen, 2008)

A work community is formed by people who work and accomplish their basic tasks. Thus, a work community is defined as a functional group that shares a common goal of work and has the same material resources and skills and cooperate. People who belong to it have a sense of belonging and emotional bond with the group. (Paasivaara & Nikkilä, 2010).

The main purpose of this research is to find an answer to how young adults perceive the sense of community in their workplace and what experiences they have regarding the sense of community and what could strengthen their sense of community.

1.1 Relevancy and motivation

The majority of us will spend up to 90,000 hours at work. (Henley, 2018). If those hours would be counted as 8-hour workdays, it would be approximately 44,8 years which is 1/3 of our lives. Therefore, it could be said that everyone's job has a massive impact on the quality of their lives.

Many people try to find their true purpose, identity, and support through the workplace and that is not a surprise since they will spend the majority of their time at work. Not too long ago the Health Enhancement Research Organization released a report that had listed at least 24 key elements that employers can utilize to create a healthy workplace culture. Many of those elements had to do with the sense of community. (Burjek, 2017).

1.2 Research aim and questions

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how young people perceive the feeling of community and what are the factors that might strengthen the sense of community.

The more specific research questions to be answered are:

How do young adults perceive the sense of community in their workplace?

What might strengthen their sense of community?

1.4 Demarcation

The main focus of this thesis is on the concept of the sense of community and how it is perceived. Young adults are defined as people between ages 20 and 30 years.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five different sections, introduction, theoretical framework, empirical study, discussion, and conclusion. The theoretical framework presents theories and studies regarding the sense of community.

The empirical study consists of; research method to understand the employee's perspective, the results, and the analysis based on the data that was conducted from the research.

In the discussion section, the author is looking for answers to whether the theory, results, conclusions and possible recommendations are related for future study purposes.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The author will explain the theories that have been published and researched regarding the sense of community and topics that are often associated with it in this chapter. The main topics that are discussed in this chapter are the definition of the sense of community, two sides of the sense of community, the core of the sense of community and the sense of community in a work community.

2.1 The definition of the sense of community

The work itself is a crucial part of adult life. It is still very common to exclude personal life from the workplace in organizational culture. The importance of work and the motivating factors that are emphasized may vary in a person's life cycle in different stages. In addition to the stages of the life cycle, the way that the work is positioned in a person's life is also affected. People's characteristics in the work community are influenced by various life situations and lifestyles. Many problems in the work communities come up from people's different ways of doing things and from the way of expressing their feelings and thoughts. (Viitala, 2004).

The sense of community is important because it is potentially a great source of energy and motivation for many employees. In this thesis the sense of community is considered as "a feeling where the members feel that they belong to a community, are a part of a community and where they are attached to the community" according to McMillan's and Chavis's definition of the sense of community. (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)

Millington (2014) has described in his "The Holy Grail of Building Communities: Developing A Strong Sense of Community" article; *a sense of community is an idea that the community can be either experienced or imagined*. In order to create a strong sense of community, it's crucial to understand the principles of creating it. The core principles of the sense of community were introduced in McMillan's

and Chavis' (1986) article. The four main elements that were highlighted were; membership, influence, integration, and fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connections. (Millington, 2014).

McMillan defined membership as the feeling of belonging and being part of the community or sharing the feeling of being related or connected to it personally. It is a feeling where the individual has become a member and has the right to belong. Membership itself has boundaries, those boundaries are between the people who belong and those who do not. The purpose of the boundaries is to provide the members with a safety net and a place where they can express their needs and their feelings and develop intimacy. (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)

Influence is defined as a sense of mattering. As a concept influence functions in two directions. (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In the first direction, a member of the community feels that they could influence the community. Even when the members cannot influence the community, the key is the feeling itself, that they feel that they could. The second direction is through cohesiveness if the group can influence and can amplify its members. (Millington, 2014)

The integration and fulfillment of needs can be considered as reinforcement. Both are the primary source of power for a strong community. A strong community consists of each individuals' values and needs. These values can be shared among the members themselves. As McMillan (1986) has quoted: "*A strong community is able to fit people together so that people meet others' needs while they meet their own*". (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

In recent years the construct of the sense of community has gained prominence in work life. The sense of community is considered to not only support, health, but also wellbeing, learning, and productiveness. (Paasivaara & Nikkilä, 2010). The emotional experience of belonging to a community is a crucial part of the sense of community (Kangaspunta, 2011). The sense of community and the feeling of people having something in common is not only complicated set of experiences and emotions. (Heinonen, 2008).

The foundation of relationships in sense of community are based on effectual, emotional and traditional matters. (Kangaspunta, 2011). It is noteworthy that those who feel like they are members of a community are involved in them and have an emotional bond to them. In both work and education communities, they reflect as an open and immediate atmosphere. (Heinonen, 2008). Cohen has stated that the boundaries of the community have symbolic nature and the community itself means different things to people. According to him the reality of the community is related to the members' perceptions of its vitality. The

community is built by people in a symbolic manner that enables and preserves its purpose and attaches their identities to it. (Cohen, 2011) . According to Max Weber's conceptualization of community, the social relationship exists only when parties in the relationship mutually engage in social activity. Even though the communal relationship is based on a sense of belonging, it does not form a relationship between the parties alone. Thus, common characteristics, common situations, and conditions, or even similar behavior do not form itself in social relationships. (Kangaspunta, 2011).

During Heinonen's research process, she had assumed that the sense of community as experience would vary between men, women, Europeans, Asians or younger or older people. Through different case studies and analyzing multiple outcomes, the results, however showed that the sense of community was, in fact, an emotional phenomenon. The differences between the above groups in these experiences were almost impossible to detect.

Some scholars have faced criticism for their idealism when defining communities since the positive features often overshadow the negative features. The definition becomes more diverse when communities and the sense of community are re-examined and viewed as multidisciplinary in different fields of study. This makes it partly problematic however, different theories may support or complement each other. There is no single correct classification or formula for the sense of community that it could be described as. At an individual level community and the sense of community are mostly perceived from a personal perspective. The individual can choose where they belong and commit to. (Heinonen, 2008)

2.1.1 Two sides of the sense of community

The positive sense of community strengthens the basis of human existence. The sense of community can be a crucial source of power. When the sense of community is positive and has a purposeful action, people's differences and constructive contradictions within interaction are accepted. The diversity of the individuals brings energy to the community and on which the community can be built. Accepting differences is the foundation of the sense of community. (Paasivaara & Nikkilä, 2010).

The negative sense of community means that there is uniformity within the community that is controlled and strictly standardized. At its worst, the community's motive can be to avoid contradictions to the extreme to create a sense of security and continuity. By doing this, members of the work community give

up their own identity to blend in the community and integrity of the group and rule out, silence or negate differences. (Paasivaara & Nikkilä, 2010).

2.1.2 The core of the sense of community

The common mission and its clarification are at the core of a healthy work community. In order to perform better within the task from a redirection perspective, it involves focusing the energy into the main task and personal growth and self-development at work.

Being aware of the fears, insecurities and feeling powerless at a community level can open a new path, however, it's not the easiest way. As a starting point for building and strengthening the sense of community could be building trust, if it creates internal security in a process of constant change. Talking openly about the feelings releases the energy for work itself, which otherwise would be spent on hiding the emotions and fears.

The key is to shine a light on the work communities' organizational core, which is why they exist, what are their core values and what is it that they want to create. Understanding the deeper meaning in a joint action enables a genuine commitment and acts as a motivating force. Clarity of the purpose of the activity replaces the traditional long-term plans. Plans are no longer working and it's necessary to be able to see alternative futures and know what the aim is.

It takes a sign of courage to surrender to some degree of chaos and the unknown, which is also known as the zone where new things can be learned. This means both greater freedom and responsibility for each member of the work community. The perception of the whole allows functioning in a continuous change and chaos without it becoming uncontrolled bouncing or drifting. (Takanen, 2005).

There's an undeniable connection between the organizational performance and the well-being of its members. Employee satisfaction is even statistically and significantly related to productivity in managerial activities. Thus, by developing the work community's leadership and skills it also improves economic growth.

According to the World Bank, human and social capital can explain economic growth four times more effectively than a physical investment. Human capital consists of both individual competences as well as the ability to learn. The development of capital is essentially influenced by the quality of the operating

environment, which either enables or hinders its development. The quality of the operating environment is influenced by networks, work processes, atmosphere, common working practices, and trust as well as the ability to think and act together. In an open and confidential spirit, human capital can also be grown.

There has been a discussion regarding team-based organizations for over a couple of decades. So, what kind of connections have been found between teamwork and performance?

The group's perceptions of its effectiveness affect the performance: the more the group believes that they can be productive, the better the results will be. The opportunity to participate in decision making increases productivity. An innovative atmosphere is a crucial contributor to productivity.

Productivity, as well as group cohesiveness and job satisfaction, seem to be interdependent. Within clear division workgroups that have worked for at least a year the cohesiveness and the number of interactions were more important for productivity than the clarity of the goals and the factors that were related to the task itself. The sense of cohesiveness increases productivity and job satisfaction.

The team effectiveness has been influenced by the ability to plan the work, the interdependence of the team members, the team structure, the internal processes of the team and the support of the managers. Through teams, employees can make themselves heard. The links that have been found between the team heterogeneity and efficiency are contradictory, as the studies have shown that the heterogeneity increases the performances, but also that it reduces the performance. The better the group members know each other the more effective the group can be. (Manka, 2010)

2.1.3 The sense of community in a work community

The importance of the work community is significant in human life. The way that a person experiences their everyday work by encountering and interacting with people at the workplace affect their lives. People serve in the work community in order to achieve a common goal. This basic task expresses the ultimate reason or purpose for the existence and function of the work community.

There are many types of working communities. The usual way to divide them is to do it according to their goals. The most common way is to distinguish between, business, government and third sector work communities, such as voluntary organizations and associations. Goals can be related to the community's overall purpose of the activity in a way that serves to achieve the overall goal.

The members of the work community are in constant interaction with each other and they share common goals and have a sense of cohesion. Interaction can take place either in formal or informal groups. To understand the sense of community, one must be aware of the work community's culture, associated myths regarding it and group dynamics.

Basic elements of the work community include bringing members together, building and sharing resources to achieve the purpose and goals, coordinating structure, leadership, transparency within the system, beliefs, values assumptions, and norms. The fundamental factor expresses both the functional and symbolic common feature within the community. Essentially everything that happens within the work community should be related to the basic task. In addition to the goals that are related to the basic tasks of working together, each individual has their personal goals that they seek to achieve as members of the work community. These include, for instance achieving a certain position, gaining appreciation, or self-actualization in a challenging job. (Paasivaara & Nikkilä, 2010)

The sense of community can not be created in an instant, but instead, it consists of building the atmosphere together. It is not about being similar but being able to see the social cohesion and respecting diversity and differences. The sense of community is not only the purpose but a fact that it's necessary to understand when working. It is one entity and one world where everything affects everything. (Takanen, 2005)

When speaking about the sense of community as a concept it can be associated with the quality of life and includes the feeling that a human being matters to each other and the crowd. According to Maslow's suggestion the sense of belonging is a basic human need. (Maslow, 1954). Therefore, the feeling of belonging is related to both social and psychological function in a positive way. (Hagerty, et al., 1996). A sense of belonging is associated with social integration, according to Hagerty and Patusky. (Maslow, 1954).

According to Hall, several steps need to be done in order to learn to increase the sense of belonging. One is to look up for similarities with other people rather than focusing or giving too much value on how different the person is and accepting as they are. It doesn't necessarily mean that when the person is accepting that they are completely agreeing.

Another way to build a sense of belonging is to try to develop accepting other people's views even though they might not be aligned with another person. It starts with opening the thought for the idea that there's

a value to how everybody else is thinking. The common ground can be found between the lines even when one is disagreeing. Validation is the key and is an acknowledgment. (Hall, 2014).

Every employee is different and requires different sets of needs. It is required for leaders to acknowledge and to understand the potential of individuals within a team and how their team chemistry and dynamics work, to reach the fullest potential. Making sure that every employee feels like they are part of the company and each one of them has its purpose within the workplace. That is the key to a strong community and where everyone's needs are met. (Huish, 2018).

The sense of community is being built because it enables learning, sharing knowledge and the well-being of the work community. These factors provide a solid foundation for success and accountable results. Ultimately the sense of community is built on shared thought and action patterns, especially when it comes to a shared mission and envisioning a bigger picture. It's also about building a central part of the sense of community and finding the team spirit. It's a power that creates an atmosphere for trust and co-creation. Through the sense of community, many changes can be confronted as opportunities, not threats. (Takanen, 2005)

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Qualitative research

This chapter addresses how the methodological approach was implemented to investigate how young adults perceive the sense of community. Within this chapter the method will be explained and how the data was collected and analyzed. The author found the qualitative research method more suitable for this specific research since the focus is on how the young adults perceive the sense of belonging and considered the best way to get the answers for the research questions and the aim is by using the qualitative method. The perception of young adults is related to their feelings, experiences and therefore the qualitative research was a better option.

The overall research questions to be answered in this thesis were:

How do young adults perceive the sense of community in their workplace?

What might strengthen their sense of community?

For this particular research, a qualitative approach is used for data collection and analysis, to gain a deeper understanding of matters surrounding the issue. With the qualitative research approach, the objective is to understand a specific group's experiences and tell a story with it. (Bryman, 2012)

Qualitative research is a research method where the words are more emphasized than the quantities or numbers in both data collection and data analysis. Qualitative research has three main features that are worthy of mentioning; the relationship between the theory and the research also known as an inductive view, understanding the interpretation of the world that participants have described, also known as an epistemological position, and the social properties are results of interactions that the individuals have in between, also known as an ontological position. (Bryman, 2012)

3.1.1 Individual interviews and interview guide

Since the qualitative research method was chosen, the author had decided to do semi-structured interviews, where the author can get close and personal with each participant. The semi-structured interview is where the author doesn't have a formal list of questions, instead will ask questions that have an open end that allows for the discussion with the participants. One of the reasons for choosing to have open-ended questions was to avoid answers such as "Yes" and "No" and to form the questions in a way that the participants could provide their genuine input and thoughts when answering. The questions were based on the theoretical framework and the list of questions is meant to guide the whole conversation.

Semi-structured interviews are used in a way that the researcher can be more open-minded, and what is necessary for the researcher to know. In this concept, the theories can appear from the data. (Bryman, 2012)

There was in total seven separate interviews which were conducted for this thesis. The interview questions can be divided into four different themes; background, sense of community, interaction and improvement.

The first 1-4 questions were related to their background at work. The author thought that it was a good way to warm up the participants with basic questions of their current workplace. Questions 5-10 were related to the sense of community; the participants were asked that how they perceive the sense of community, what is the sense of community at their workplaces like and what challenges do they face and what are the things that affect their community, in order to find out and to understand what is the

perception and what the reality is when it comes to the sense of community. Questions 11-17 were related to the interaction in their workplace; what kind of interaction do they have in the company on a general level and how does it work, what are the conflicts that arise and how are they handled, and if they can tell their own opinions and what makes them feel heard. Questions 18-22 were related to improvement; what they consider as a good working community, what works and what does not and how the sense of community could be improved. The interview guide can be found in Appendix 2.

3.1.2 Choosing the informants

The interview participants were chosen based on convenience sampling. The requirement was that they are young adults and they are currently working in Finland. The participants have worked in both international and national companies and all of them represent different work sectors in Finland. All seven informants currently work in the private sector. A convenience sample is one of the non-probability sample methods and the advantage is that it's accessible for the researcher. There are good chances for a good response rate. (Bryman, 2012).

Table 1. The interviewees

Participants	Gender	Age	The time at the same workplace	Sector or Industry	How many employees are in their department
1	Female	29	1,5 months	Service Sector	Three
2	Female	29	2 years	Transportation	Seven
3	Male	22	9 months	Car Industry	Six
4	Male	26	2 years	Constructions	Fifty
5	Male	30	1 year	Trade & Labor Union	Sixteen
6	Female	23	5 months	Design & Specialist services, Engineering	Fifteen
7	Female	24	2 months	Professional Services	Four

As the interviews were semi-structured, which allowed the discussion to go smoothly by having some follow up questions they differed from each other by not having the same questions in each interview. The participants responded to each question that the author had presented. The majority of the questions were open-ended, excluding the questions that were regarding their demographics and their current position. The participants represent seven different sectors that were: service sector, transportation, card industry, constructions, trade & labor union, Design and Specialist services, engineering, and

professional services. The research questions and structure can be found in Appendix 2. The interviews took an estimate 30 minutes.

3.1.3 Data collection and analysis

In qualitative data analysis, analytic induction was used as a strategy and research logic. Analytic induction is used for guiding data collection, developing analysis and presenting the findings in the research. (Katz, 2001). The process of the analytic induction starts with a rough definition of the research question, and from there it continues to a hypothetical explanation of the problem and then it proceeds to the collection of the data. (Bryman, 2012). According to Cressey (1953), the analytic induction four stages are; defining the field, making a hypothetical explanation of the research question, examining the case to see if it fits with the facts and then modifying whether it confirms the hypothetical explanation or hypothesis and then analyzing the further cases. (Cressey, 1953).

The participants were interviewed during October 2019. Four out of seven interviews were conducted as face to face interviews, while two out of seven were interviewed via Skype and one via telephone. Both face to face interviews, online, and phone interviews took approximately from 15-minutes to 30-minutes. It's worth to mention that the interviews that were conducted online and via phone may have an impact on the quality of the research since it differs from the face to face interview in a sense that it feels closer and more personal. All the participants were given a consent form before the interview started, where they were informed that the interview was recorded and transcribed for the research purposes. The consent form can be found in Appendix 1. All research materials are stored in a way that the author has the only permission to utilize them. It was important to the author that the participants remain anonymous.

Data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with seven employees. All the employees work in Finland and represent seven different private work sectors. The author wanted to interview seven different employees from different work sectors, in order to get a better understanding, whether there is a difference in the perception of the sense of community despite or their work background.

The author has used qualitative analysis and analytic induction. One of the main challenges when it comes to qualitative research is that as (Miles 1979) has described it as “attractive nuisance”, since the data is rich however there's a challenge when trying to find the common thread and not be distracted by

the richness of the data. It's essential to try to carry out the true analysis and avoid getting into as Lofland (1917:18) calls "analytic interruptus". (Bryman, 2012)

One of the well-known definitions for content analysis goes as follows according to Holsti; "Any technique making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages". (Holsti, 1969).

The author used an ethnographic content analysis approach where the emphasis is on the investigation role and understanding the meaning in the context. (Bryman, 2012)

The data was interpreted side by side with the theoretical framework to identify the variations, comparisons, and patterns in the findings, that will be addressed later in the discussion section.

3.1.4 Trustworthiness and reliability of the research

Trustworthiness is one of the most important benchmarks of research. It involves the conclusions that were generated and drawn from research. (Bryman, 2012). It's worth to mention that the number of interviews was limited. Due to having seven interviews some of which were face to face meetings, via telephone and online platforms there were some challenges regarding understanding the interview questions. The author had to ask a few follow up questions to help the respondents to answer the questions within their best ability, therefore many of the following questions have been different in each interview.

In qualitative research, there are two types biased that often qualitative researchers come across. The first type is a participant bias and second is researcher bias. Different types of participant biases may include four smaller biases that are known as; friendliness bias, social acceptability bias, habituation bias, and sponsor bias. (Shah, 2019)

Friendliness bias happens when the participant decides to agree with the researcher. Social acceptability bias happens when participants respond inaccurately to get an acceptance or think they would be liked. Habituation bias occurs when participants deliver the same answers for questions that are worded similarly. Sponsor bias occurs when the participants' opinion is influenced by the sponsor. (Shah, 2019)

There are different types of researcher biases as well that are confirmation bias and question-order bias, leading question and wording bias. In confirmation bias, the researcher interprets the data to support their hypothesis, or they could also exclude the data that doesn't work in their favor for their hypothesis.

Question-order bias is when the questions influence on the responses to the following questions that are based on their previous response to the question that can cause a biased and inaccurate answer. In leading questions and wording bias the questions lead the participants in a direction for likely results in biased answers. (Shah, 2019)

To avoid being biased the researcher must be aware of the different types of biases that were mentioned previously. The researcher has followed a few steps to avoid bias in this research. The researcher has framed the questions for the research by making them open-ended. This method prevents the participants from simple “Yes” or “No” answers and guides the participants to provide genuine answers. The researcher made and phrased the questions in a simple way that is both easy for the participants to understand and to answer. Another thing that is worth mentioning that the researcher constructed the questions for the interview. First by asking general questions from the participants before going into the topic. The researcher found the questions to be easier to follow by dividing them into different themes. The researcher also made sure that the participants were aware that there are no right or wrong answers so they wouldn’t feel the need to please anyone and that there is no pressure when answering the questions. The author tried to follow these guidelines to accomplish true analysis. However, it’s worth to mention that the risk of being biased is always present in many types of research studies, therefore the key is to be objective and try to prevent or at least minimize bias in all research processes. The researcher is confident about what findings they have gained which might apply to the larger populations.

4 RESULTS

Within this chapter, the author presents the results from the empirical data collection that was conducted from the semi-structured interviews and answers in the thesis for the research question by using the interview participants provided results. The overall research question for this thesis were:

How do young adults perceive the sense of community in their workplace?

What might strengthen their sense of community?

The interview questions were based on theories regarding the definition of the sense of community and its core values. The main goal was to find out what these concepts mean to the participants and how the results can be interpreted with the theory. Each participant answered all questions from different themes and described them according to their own experiences and thoughts.

Interview Questions' Themes:



Figure 1. The Interview Questions' Themes

4.1 Interview results

When it came to writing about the sense of community in the theoretical part of this thesis it was clear for the author to divide the sense of community into smaller sections. What it is theoretically and compared to the participants' perception of the sense of community. What they are expecting or hoping for the sense of community if it was under their decision making. In the empirical part of the thesis, the results were drawn from the interview's results. The author has made a summary of these interviews regarding the sense of community.

4.2 The sense of community according to the participants

Each participant had their perception of the sense of community. What every participant had in common was that they had similar factors in mind that influence the sense of community tremendously. According to the participants the core for the sense of community are; the feeling of belonging into the group and community, getting along with colleagues and others, being able to communicate openly with one another, and even if they would have any kind of disagreements they could get past it and still work together professionally. Respondent 6 answered:

"The sense of community is where everyone feels like they belong to and each person can adapt to the work community if they choose to. From day one, the managers make sure that the new employee can blend in the group. The managers give you time and make you feel that you matter, and your work contribution matters, give your words a value, being open and give some critique, both negatives, and

positives in a pleasant way. Ask how you are doing, how were your expectations met and what are you expecting from the workplace and support you to take up the challenge.”

Respondent 5 answered:

“It means cooperating and everybody gets along with one another and communicating on weekly basis, sharing the work and everything else that belongs to it.”

Respondent 2 answered:

“Family is maybe a too strong word for it, but it is sort of a group of friends, since you do spend a lot of time at work. For me it is important to know with whom I will be spending my time with. It directly affects me, for instance if it is nice to go to work in the morning and I also think it is nice to do everything together.”

Respondent 7 answered:

“It is a community where everyone is able to work together. They do not necessarily have to be friends, but everyone should get along be able to work with one another professionally.”

The negative aspect consisted of not being able to communicate with others openly, having bad energy and team spirit that affects everybody, being envious and having a different amount of work or workload and not taking into account each employee own skills and making the employee do something that they are not interested in or motivated. Respondent 4 answered:

“Negative matters that pop up in my mind regarding the sense of community are bad team spirit and the firm not having good employees. People are different and it’s up to them if they want to adapt to a new workplace, so it’s not only dependent on the workplace. Bad communication or if a new employee arrives do the employers know how to teach them. Being able to teach the new employee is very important, to guide them into their appointed work task.”

Respondent 5 answered:

“Jealousy, imbalance of workload and that different kinds of people manages the work differently.”

Respondent 6 answered:

“When the employees’ skills are not taken into account and they are put into a position to do a job in which they are not interested in nor motivated. When people are not compassionate when it comes to work. Setting the bar too high and hearing that you are expected to deliver this kind of result, without considering the skills and abilities.”

The work communities amongst the respondents varied since all the respondents represent seven different work industries. However, the division could be made within those that represent the multinational company while the others represent the domestic company in Finland. Those respondents that work in the multinational company brought up one of the topics that they consider their work community to be more open-minded and not having as the hierarchical system in the sense that they are very international and multicultural work communities. Two of the domestic companies within Finland had a large gender divide among the workers; one gender was over-represented than the other. Overall all the respondents’ companies have a large age distribution.

When speaking about the work communities, often challenges may arise when working together. The empirical data showed how challenges when collaborating arises and the majority of the issues within the respondents’ company that they are working for were related to communication. For one reason or another, the communication flow isn’t as fluent as it could be. Usually, the hiccup comes from e.g. data protection regulation where the communication isn’t shared, general information isn’t shared for all or if the other employees are operating from abroad it can also create some misunderstanding and challenges.

Respondent 1 answered:

“We do have some challenges, especially with foreign agents from abroad. They don’t always understand what we need.”

Respondent 3 answered:

“For instance, if another person is busy, of course it will affect the cooperation. If one is unable to catch them or get some answers, then there’s nothing that could be done for the project. We have culture

differences, because our company is international. Some people do not know Finnish or Swedish, therefore it may be difficult.”

Respondent 5 answered:

“Some work while others do not, nobody knows who does what.”

The respondents had brought up the matters that affect the sense of community and it can be split into two perspectives; positives and the negatives. When it came to the positive factors they were related to communication, team spirit, being honest, getting good customer feedback and getting acknowledged and success as a group. While the negative factors were considered as stress, the pressure from work, hectic timetables, having a huge workload and if they aren't able to do their work well. Respondent 1 answered:

“The factors that affect the sense of community in our work is that we sometimes have events together, such as on Friday, we had dinner at a restaurant and common activities in order to tighten up the group.”

Respondent 7 answered:

“The negative factors that affect our sense of community are; work stress, when there are too many things on the table and if all of the systems don't work or perform well, then we can't do our work well.”

The researcher has asked the respondents if it was up to their power what would they consider as a good work community. Respondent 2 answered:

“Such as where the support and help will be given if needed. The open atmosphere, where everybody dares to bring their thoughts, opinions, and suggestion. That kind where it's easy going and not constricted. A place where you can be yourself and not fit in the company's mold.”

Respondent 5 answered:

“Good work community is where we try together to improve our work. Not that kind where we get back into old habits. The work community where you will be heard, and you understand other people's workload. If one does more and then others will want to help.”

Five out of seven respondents considered a better way to improve the sense of community compared to the one that they have currently was by having common activities together with the employees, to get them to know each other better on a personal level. When knowing each other on a personal level they not only get to know one another's strengths and weaknesses, but they can also release their stress levels and get peer support. Respondent 6 had a different take on improving the sense of community. Respondent 6 answered:

"The sense of community can be improved if within the recruitment process the employees' expertise and social skills were considered then it adds value. Also, if the employees would be chosen in the same method, then it could work."

4.3 How does the interaction affect the sense of community

The interaction within the work community varies depending on the company. In one of the respondent's company, the challenge is that they do not interact, and they do not know what the other employees are doing. While as in most of the respondents' company they are quite open-minded and straightforward when it comes to interaction, in a sense that they can go straight to talk to the person or talk to their managers. The respondents were asked what kind of interaction they have in the company. Respondent 5 answered:

"Really bad, nobody talks to one another about their job. We interact via weekly meetings."

Respondent 2 answered:

"Our interaction in the company is straightforward and honest. Since we are a startup firm it can be sometimes very chaotic, since we might not have thought about our communication channels through and how we are communicating with each other. It sometimes can create confusion, but it's alright since it could be worse. We have quite close-knitted workgroup and there has been open communication and we have moved things forward. Transparency and open communication are our assets."

Respondent 3 answered:

"From my own experience the interaction has been a bit difficult. Big reason for it, is that many people have been in the firm for a very long time and they have this mindset of why should we make any changes"

when it works this way. It might help and make an influence if we discuss about it, however it does depend on a matter. Some things work in specific way.”

Many of the conflicts that are related to interaction have to do with either being misunderstood due to communicating methods. The negative face to face or via different channels or the employees have different solutions for the same problem, and they do not agree on the option that was chosen or decision. Even though these conflicts and disagreements arise the best way to solve them according to the respondents is by communicating and talking about the issue, agreeing to disagree and if necessary, talking with the managers about the issue. Respondent 6 answered:

“I would say that since in the Design, Specialist and Engineering field we have many solutions for the same problem and some conflicts might arise, e.g. my solution is the right answer. What we are trying to say is that can we do it instead in this way.”

5 DISCUSSION

Within this section of the research, the theoretical part, as well as the empirical part of the thesis, are connected. Whether the theory that has been presented in previous chapters support the data that the author has received and discussed.

The thesis set out to answer the following research question:

How do young adults perceive the sense of community?

What might strengthen their sense of community?

By doing the semi-structured interviews, the author has gained some answers to the research question from the respondents. The author has received data that gives the author a better understanding when it comes to the sense of community and how it's perceived amongst young adults.

5.1 How do young adults perceive the sense of community?

The first research question to be answered was how young adults perceive the sense of community. As in the beginning of the thesis McMillan's and Chavis's definition for the sense of community was *"a feeling where the members feel that they belong to a community, are a part of a community and where they are attached to the community."* The most important factors that the participants considered when it came to the sense of community were that they *belong to the community and they both know and get along with their colleagues and know their purpose within the company and are able to have emotional connections*. The empirical research supports the McMillan's and Chavis's four main core elements of the sense of community.

"The sense of community is where everyone feels like they belong to and each person can adapt to the work community if they choose to. From day one, the managers make sure that the new employee can blend in the group. The managers give you time and make you feel that you matter, and your work contribution matters, give your words a value, being open and give some critique, both negatives, and positives in a pleasant way. Ask how you are doing, how were your expectations met and what are you expecting from the workplace and support you to take up the challenge."

As Paasivaara & Nikkilä (2010) have both described, that there are different aspects when describing the sense of community. The positive sense of community strengthens the basis of human existence and it can be a crucial source of power. The foundation of the sense of community is accepting the differences and the participants have showed in the empirical part of the research that it's one of the key elements when it comes to the sense of community.

"It is a community where everyone is able to work together. We don't necessarily have to be friends, but everyone should get along be able to work with one another professionally."

While as Paasivaara & Nikkilä (2010) have described the negative sense of community as controlled and strictly standardized and the members of the community may give up on their own identity just to blend in. The empirical research showed according to one of the participants that it might not only be up to the people of the community to make a negative sense of community but it also is in the hands of the individuals.

“Negative matters that pop up in my mind regarding the sense of community are bad team spirit and the firm not having good employees. People are different and it’s up to them if they want to adapt to a new workplace, so it’s not only dependent on the workplace. Bad communication or if a new employee arrives do the employers know how to teach them. Being able to teach the new employee is very important, to guide them into their appointed work task.”

As Heinonen has assumed during the research process that the sense of community as an experience would differ between men, women, Europeans, or younger or older people the empirical research did show that the perception of the sense of community among young adults were indeed almost impossible to detect by their background.

5.2 What might strengthen their sense of community?

According to Takanen’s theory the core of a healthy community is explained as being aware of the key values and understanding of the company’s true purpose and focusing the energy in to the main task and personal growth and self-development at work. By knowing and understanding the deep meaning of the actions it does not only act as a motivating force, but it also enables for a genuine commitment. The empirical research supports this as the participants have described a good community similarly.

“Such as where the support and help will be given if needed. The open atmosphere, where everybody dares to bring their thoughts, opinions, and suggestion. That kind where it’s easy going and not constricted. A place where you can be yourself and not fit in the company’s mold.”

Manka (2010) affirmed that there’s a connection between both organizational performance and the well-being of its members. Personnel satisfaction is related to productivity in managerial activities. To raise productivity, it requires an innovative atmosphere, cohesiveness and job satisfaction. To have an effective the group, the group members need to know each other on a personal level.

6 Conclusion

The sense of community is a crucial part of every organization, it supports health, wellbeing and learning and productiveness and it has a strong impact on the organization and its purpose. The purpose of this thesis was to find out and investigate how the sense of community is perceived, what it is and what it

could be and understanding different factors that may affect the sense of community. The research was conducted among young adults that work in Finland in different work sectors. This thesis was a qualitative research study and interviews were conducted and led by using a semi-structured method. Seven young adults had participated in individual interviews.

The sense of community as a concept consists of four main principles that McMillan and Chavis (1986) have represented in their article. The four main principles were; membership, influence, integration, and fulfillment of needs and a shared emotional connection. To be able to create a strong sense of community it's crucial to understand the four principles for creating it. A strong community consists of everyone's values and needs. These values can be shared among the members themselves.

The results demonstrate that despite their background or experiences all participants had similar factors in common when it comes to the factors that influence the sense of community. The factors that the sense of community is considered as; *the feeling of belonging, cooperation, and open communication*. While as the core of the sense of community was described as; *open communication, true purpose, and value and the sense of belonging and knowing the colleagues*. The study encourages organizations to take into consideration how much the sense of community affects the employees and their motivation and productiveness. What potential does every employee and organization have if all factors that affect the sense of community are acknowledged and how much can the employees offer to the organization and the work community.

6.1 Recommendations for future research

For future research, it's recommended to investigate and explore new theories regarding the sense of community that could add more value and continue the previous studies and claims.

Since the research was rather small, it's suggested to have a bigger number of participants to prove the previous claims and make the conclusions. Even though the number of respondents within this research was small, it was still possible to draw some conclusions of their perception of the sense of community and how it's linked to productivity and motivation.

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APPENDIX 1

Työyhteisöllisyys tutkimus

Suostumus haastattelututkimukseen osallistumisesta

Annan suostumukseni seuraavaan:

Osallistun vapaaehtoisesti haastattelututkimukseen.

Ymmärrän, että voin milloin tahansa vetäytyä haastattelututkimuksesta syytä ilmoittamatta.

Ymmärrän, että tutkimuksen tekijä kerää haastattelusta aineistoa. Hän tekee haastattelusta muistiinpanoja ja haastattelu voidaan tallentaa sekä äänitallenteena että äänitallenteen litterointina.

Ymmärrän, että haastattelussa kerättyä aineistoa käytetään opinnäytetyötutkimukseen.

Allekirjoitan tämän suostumuslomakkeen yhdessä haastattelijan kanssa.

Paikka, Päiväys

Osallistujan allekirjoitus ja nimenselvennys

Haastattelijan allekirjoitus ja nimenselvennys

APPENDIX 2

Puolistrukturoitu haastattelupohja:

- Kauanko olet työskennellyt yrityksessä?
- Kuinka monta työntekijää on teidän osastolla?
- Mikä on teidän osaston tavoite?
- Ketkä kuuluvat teidän työyhteisöön?

Työyhteisöllisyys/Yhteisöllisyys

- Mitä työyhteisöllisyys tarkoittaa?
- Mitkä seikat tulevat mieleen, kun puhutaan työyhteisöllisyydestä? Positiiviset ja negatiiviset?
- Millainen työyhteisö teillä on yrityksessä? Mistä eri asioista työyhteisösi koostuu?
- Miten teette yhteistyötä muiden osastojen kanssa?
- Onko teillä haasteita?
- Mitkä seikat vaikuttavat teidän yhteisöön? Mitkä ovat positiivisia tai negatiivisia?

Vuorovaikutus

- Millainen vuorovaikutus teillä on yrityksessä?
- Miten vuorovaikutus toimii käytännössä teillä?
- Millaisia konflikteja/erimielisyyksiä teillä syntyy?
- Miten konflikteja/erimielisyyksiä hoidetaan?
- Koetko, että teillä kommunikointi on avointa teidän työyhteisössä?
- Pystytkö kertomaan omia mielipiteitä tai kehitys ideoita?
- Mikä saa sinut tuntemaan kuulluksi?

Kehittäminen

- Mikä on omasta mielestäsi hyvä työyhteisö?
- Mikä mielestäsi toimii työyhteisössä?
- Mikä mielestäsi ei toimi työyhteisössä?
- Miten mielestäsi työyhteisöllisyyttä voidaan parantaa?